Ningpo Feb. 9th 1852

To the Soc. of Inquiry at Princeton

Dear Brethren,

It is somewhat remarkable that of our large Mission here I am at present the only representative from your Society. There was a time when Princeton Students comprised a half of the Mission – but Bro Lowrie has been removed by death, Bro Loomis by ill-health, & Bros Culbertson & Wight have been transferred to Shanghae – the former temporarily ~~till~~ ~~the~~ [illegible] to take part in the translation of the Scriptures, & the latter permanently. From Amoy two excellent brethren Lloyd & Brown have been removed, the one by death & the other by ill-health. The only members of the Society that I am now aware of in China are Bros Culbertson & Wight at Shanghae, French at Canton, & Baldwin of the Am. Bd. at Fuh-Chau & myself here. Truly this is a small quota for China from a Seminary that for many years has annually graduated forty & fifty students! I do not know that you have for a year or two at least heard from this station, nor have I been informed of the receipt of letters from ~~Princeton~~ the Society by any of us since I have been here. Is it not possible that a fuller & larger correspondence will awaken renewed interest in the foreign Missionary work? I well know the effect of letters from China & India &c upon some*, while I was in the Seminary, who are now Missionaries of the Cross. It appears to me that the more definite & extensive our views are of Missionary work the more distinctly will this great field come up before our mind when we are called to have the all-important question decided "Where shall I go to preach the Gospel"? – And it is not from eloquent disquisitions or even sober histories that we so well learn about countries & places as from familiar letters or from the living voice. Hence it always has appeared to me that, free conversation with returned Missionaries excepted, the best medium of information is from such letters. If you do not already correspond with any of them I can assure you that you would derive a great deal of information from either of the four brethren above named – for they are all sterling men. And if my poor attempt is of no better service I should be gratified if I could recommend them to your correspondence.

My residence in China has been of three years continuance tho' it was not till after six months from our arrival that we reached this port. The difficulties of getting from Canton to Ningpo were greater then than at present, but even now it is far better for one destined to this port to come direct to Shanghae from which access is comparatively easy. That city has of late years become a place of such extensive trade that almost all Missy. Boards have representatives there, and accordingly two of our members were directed to commence a mission, one of whom (Bro Wight) will be permanently located. In connection with this object Bro Culbertson has another which especially detains him at Shanghae - to wit the translation of the Old Testament into the written language of China. The Committee of which he is a member has however so materially diminished that it is very probable that ~~this~~ it will, for the present at least, cease to act, and we hope ~~think it very probable~~ that he will return to us before long - tho' this is uncertain. The importance of having a uniform translation of the Scriptures was early felt, and measures were taken ten years ago to bring about so happy a result. Dr. Morrison's translation is very literal but in many respects imperfect, nor are the separate translations of Dr. Medhurst & Dr. Gutzlaff much prized. Accordingly an attempt was made about 8 years since to carry on a translation at the separate stations with the intention of subjecting the whole work to a general committee which met I think early in 1847 at Shanghae. It was formed of the following individuals - Dr. Medhurst & Bishop Boone of Shanghae, Dr. Bridgman of Canton, Rev John Stronach (Lon. Miss) of Amoy & our own lamented Mr Lowrie. Upon the death of the last mentioned Mr Milne, the oldest son of the excellent Dr. Milne, & who is himself an excellent Missionary of the London Society was chosen to succeed him. This committee translated the New Testament, which was revised by them & printed a year ago. Bishop Boone took little active part however in translating on account of constant liability to illness, tho' his pen has been constantly & very usefully employed in defending the terms ~~&c~~ used by the greatest part of the Missionaries in China for & as translations of God & Spirit. These vexed questions have been largely discussed here & also in England. The merits of the question you are doubtless in the main acquainted with. For God the term used by all the Miss^s. here & at Fuh-Chau & at Canton (with one exception I believe) & by all at Shanghae excepting the London Missionaries & Mr Jenkins of the S. Meth. Board, & by the Amer. Bap. Mission at Hong Kong is Shin the generic word for deity or what is to be worshipped, & for Spirit they use Ling, which has the meaning of spirit as nearly as can be. The London Missionaries & Mr J. and the two Am. Bd. Miss^s. at Amoy, Messrs Doty & Talmage (and they alone I believe) employ Shang-ti (supreme Ruler) & which is the name of one of the chief Shin or deities, the Jupiter of the Chinese; & for Spirit they employ Shin. The Rom. Catholics early agreed upon T'een-Chü (Heaven's Lord) ~~by~~ & they are universally called the T'een-Chü sect, whereas Protestants designate themselves, & seek to have themselves known as the sect or followers of Jesus. The meaning of this is of course somewhat different from what the simple words imply – for we do not of course discard T'een-Chü as our Lord also. Yet the distinction is valuable here. The members of the Committee not having been able to agree, blanks were to be left in the N.T. wherever these two words occurred, to be filled up by either party as they were most pleased with; and thus there was soon after an edition of 5000 copies of the gospels & Acts printed at our press where Shin & Ling were used, and an edition of the whole of the N.Test. printed at the Lon. Miss. Press at Shanghae with the other word employed. The reason that we did not print the remainder of the N.T. was that we did not feel satisfied with the translation as to its faithfulness. By reason of the constant disability of Bishop Boone to take an active part in Com. the only one to defend the renderings of the Epistles as we would wish to render them was Dr. Bridgman; the other three members

Messrs Medhurst, Stronach & Milne (London Missionaries) holding in some respects different views in doctrine. Hence the majority was against Dr Bridgman. The style too is considered objectionable on account of its conciseness. It is too high for ~~the~~ readers in general. However as a whole it is in advance of any versions that have preceded it. Throughout this translation the representation extended to all the Miss. in China excepting the Am. & Eng. Baptists who refused to take part in it. Nearly two years ago it was agreed to go on with the O.T., but as the previous arrangement only contemplated the N.T. a new election took place at the several stations. At the same time it was voted unanimously that the former plan of translating portions at the stations & sending them to ~~the~~ the general Com. be dispensed with, & the work be immedy. begun & carried into effect by that Comee. More were elected than were disposed or able to go. As before the Eng. & Amer. Bap. Union Missionaries took no part - tho' the Southern Baptists did select Mr Shuck as their representative. Besides him from Shanghae there were in attendance upon Comee Drs Medhurst & Boone, + Mr Milne, Dr Bridgman from Canton, Mr J. Stronach from Amoy, & Mr Culbertson from this port. This Comee had not proceeded far when orders came from their Society for the London Miss. to withdraw & to work by themselves, so that the Comee a year ago consisted of Dr Bridgman, Mr Shuck, Mr Culbertson, Bish. Boone, & Mr McClatchie (of the Eng. Ch. Mission) who was afterwards elected. Not being satisfied with the little that was done in Genesis they recommenced, & have now completed that book & Exodus. The London Missionaries (Messrs Medhurst, Milne, & Stronach) continued & are already nearly thro' the historical parts of the O. Testament. It is to be feared that they have not adopted the doctrine of plenary inspiration as you hold it at Princeton - tho' their version will be in many respects good. The objectionable terms for God & Spirit are of course retained. The general Comee has proceeded slowly but we believe well, tho' it is now so reduced in number that there is reason to fear that its work will for a ~~season~~ time cease. Mr McClatchie has from the pressure of other duties been obliged to cease acting & as before Bishop Boone has been unable to take an active part. Some f two months since Dr Bridgman's ~~declining~~ failure of health withdrew him from the important part which, as the most experienced member, he performed, and now by the latest advices from Shanghae we learn that this veteran Missionary after 23 years absence from his native land was on the point of returning for a visit of a year or more. The American Consul at Shanghae Mr Cunningham gave him a free passage for himself & his excellent wife, & also promises to pay for their return passage. They were to have left in the Adelaide the 3d of this month. Accompanying them are Mrs Boone & fam, & a son of Mr Syle of the Episc. Bd., and Mrs Taylor & fam. of the S. Meth. Bd - all on account of health. Thus the Committee has greatly dwindled. Only two now are at this most important work (Messrs Shuck & Culbertson) but whether they will under these circumstances continue is very doubtful. They themselves seem anxious to proceed, but as the work would probably have again to be revised, many Missionaries think that it had better be suspended at least till Dr Bridgman's return. Before this work was commenced Mr Dean of Hong Kong & Goddard of this place, two very valuable & able Missionaries of the Am. Bap. Union commenced the translation of Genesis conjointly, and they have published Genesis & Exodus in two separate forms - one with & the other without ~~notes~~ a commentary. The text is chiefly Mr Goddard's work ~~& the~~ while Mr Dean prepared the Commentary. These are very valuable works, & commend themselves to all the Missionaries who have examined them. They are now at work at the Gospels which will soon be published by them.

Here at Ningpo we are engaged upon a different kind of work, viz - the translating the Scriptures into the colloquial language of this people. This subject you often see alluded to in Mr Lowrie's memoirs as one which he contemplated with deep interest. A year ago there was no settled orthography among the Missionaries here, each one writing the sound of this dialect as they seemed to strike him, and hence to some extent there was more or less dissimilarity in pronunciation. Indeed it was thought almost impossible to have a uniform mode of writing the colloquial. An attempt was made however by some of our Missionaries in connection with the English Church Missionaries to bring about so desirable a work — which they satisfactorily accomplished by the use of the Roman alphabet ~~or~~ ~~&~~ two vowels of which o & u were so marked as to answer for other than their natural sounds. The ~~&~~ Continental power of ~~&~~ the sound of each letter is employed. This system after nine months using & [illegible] teaching & others ~~&~~ after a very few slight modifications made by themselves, is now used by nearly all the Missionaries at Ningpo — & ~~the~~ several books have been printed in the colloquial dialect by means of this system — so that already over a hundred persons, including teachers, & scholars & servants are able to read their own spoken language readily and some to write in it with a good degree of ease. This was the chief object contemplated by the projectors of the scheme. The spoken language is very rich in all terms excepting of course those of a strictly religious nature, and yet nothing had ever even thro' the medium of the character been printed in it. Its importance was however unquestioned, and we rejoice that now the experiment has been made, which thus far proves most successful. A few books, including a hymn book (a copy of which I will send) a life of our Saviour, a geography by Rev W. Martin of our Mission & other smaller productions have been printed and others will soon follow. Every one seems surprised at the exceeding richness of this spoken language, and tho' it now appears almost devoid of grammatical structure it is to be hoped that rules of Syntax may be evolved from what appears in many respects a crude mass of materials. Our Mission in connection with the Eng. Church Missionaries (men of the most congenial spirit in every respect that we could wish) are now translating Luke, and the Gospels of Mark & John are also in progress by individuals of our number. A few of the members of our female school have been taught by Mrs. Rankin an hour each day for eight months past, and are now able to read any books thro' this medium understandingly & fluently, as well as to write with a good degree of ease. The difference between instruction thro' this mode when their mother tongue is employed, and that in which everything must be passed thro' the labyrinth of the Chinese written language is most apparent. The latter mode is like teaching a district school of ignorant children thro' the entire medium of Latin & Greek. The simplicity of the system employed is a pleasing feature. There are in what may be called the alphabet forty initials & thirty nine finals, together with eight sounds peculiar to themselves. The initials all have a common ending as if spelled by eh or ih. They are as follows K, K' (aspirated), G, Ng, M, F, V, &c &c - which are read as if spelled Keh, K'eh, Geh, Ngeh, Meh, Feh &c &c - The finals all terminate either in a vowel or a vowel followed by h, or in n or ng, as a, ah, än, or ang, e, eh, en, eng &c. Every character or simple word excepting the 8 above mentioned ~~the~~ is composed of one initial & one final. Thus JING (God) is thus spelled J (pronounced ~~spelled~~ jih) ING = Jing

K'en (to see) K' (pronounced K'eh) EN = K'en

Za (word) Z (zeh) a = za.

These 79 initials & finals are virtually two alphabets thus joined together in the spelling of each word - but as above stated they are formed from combinations or single letters of our own alphabet. Having learned these there is no difficulty for even the most stupid to put them together, as experience with our most ignorant servants shows us. There are thus with the combinations in use nearly 800 distinct sounds in this dialect. You would think that the language would be exceedingly meagre. It would indeed were there ~~are~~ no combinations to the words - but this is rarely the case in the ordinary colloquial. ~~Some~~ Generally ideas are expressed by such combinations - just as in English. We have the sound in as the beginning of ~~preceding~~ a multitude of words - such as into, indeed, influence, &c &c. So here we have e.g. the sound ken, which is connected with many ~~a multitude~~ ~~of~~ other sounds. Thus ken-dong is to influence. Lan-ken = a railing. Z-ken = a thing. Ken-chih = to cast out &c, While Ken by itself means to dare. &c &c. At present these separate words which are virtually mere syllables are separated by a hyphen as just written, tho' probably we shall by degrees remove this hindrance to the beauty of the spoken language, and write as we do in ~~our~~ our own & native tongue. The reason that this distinction still remains is that there is a Chinese character corresponding to each of these distinct words — as in the example above given, each ken has its respective & distinct character — tho' the sound is the same.

I have ~~been~~ allowed myself to write so much upon this subject as scarcely ~~to~~ give myself time to refer to any other matters. One subject which is of course always a ~~such~~ matter of inquiry is the healthfulness of Ningpo. So far as my own constitution is concerned I can speak most favourably. My health has been & is now ~~most~~ excellent. I feel as vigorous as ever at home, and if I can keep indoors during the hot months I have no fear, humanly speaking, in this respect any more than if I were at home. My family are also very well. One of our number (Bro S. Martin) is now sick, but the rest of us as well as our families are in excellent health. The houses which we have been permitted to build have proved that the money expended in this object has been a wise economy. The flour which we here obtain makes generally as good bread as at home, and our water is like the purest at home, distilled from the clouds. We have good mutton & pork & fish, and some good fruits, & tolerably good beef & veal for our tables, tho' vegetables we cannot boast of. The sweet potatoes, yams & taro, & cabbage & onions are only tolerably good. From little gardens in our own lots we are however raising some foreign vegetables. But this, by the way.

God has permitted us to see some good resulting from our labour here. The two oldest members of the school under our charge have recently been baptized, with one of Miss Aldersey's pupils — and others are inquiring the way to life. Oh how refreshing these mercy drops are in this barren waste. Pray for us that the Word of God may have free course & be glorified. Should the Lord incline any of you, dear brethren, to turn your attention toward China, ~~be~~ ~~assured that~~ to join us in this blessed work, be assured that we will give you a hearty welcome. How few alas are the labourers in this vast field. I can assure you that our Blessed Saviour's promise is most true to him who gives up all for Christ. He does receive a hundred fold more in this present time, & in the world to come everlasting life. If you have any specific questions to propose I shall gladly answer them. For the present I am your ~~[illegible]~~ fellow servant H. V. Rankin